

Old Stone House  
Brownington  
Orleans County  
Vermont

HABS No. VT-97

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VT,  
10-BROW  
3-

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WRITTEN DESCRIPTIVE AND HISTORICAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

THE OLD STONE HOUSE

HABS No. VT-97

Address: Old Stone House, Brownington, Orleans County, Vermont

Present Owner: Orleans County Historical Society

Present Occupant: Museum of Orleans County Historical Society

Statement of Significance: This is a large 4-story granite building erected as a dormitory for the Orleans County Grammar School in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. An unusually well-preserved institutional building of its period.

### PART I HISTORICAL INFORMATION

#### A Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: The Orleans County Grammar School was established in 1823 at Brownington and in 1829 Rev. Alexander L. Twilight became its Headmaster. During the early years of his leadership, the school outgrew its facilities and he proposed the construction of a dormitory. As the proposal was met with indifference, and some opposition by the members of the Prudential Committee, the governing board of the school, Rev. Twilight took it upon himself to build the dormitory. In 1847, Rev. Alexander L. Twilight left the Orleans County Grammar School. For the consideration of \$3,000.00 from the Prudential Committee, he quit all claims on the building and the one acre tract of land on which it stood, and deeded it to the Prudential Committee for the Orleans County Grammar School. In June, 1852, Rev. Alexander Twilight returned as principal and served as such until October, 1855, when stricken by paralysis he retired.

The Old Stone House, or the Stone Boarding House, as it is referred to in documents of this period, remained school property until the County Grammar School closed down, shortly after the Civil War. The widow of Rev. Twilight, Mary Ladd Twilight (+1878) who had stayed on in Brownington after her husband's death in 1857, is reputed to have acquired the building. It could not have remained in her hands long, however, for William S. Addison, an Englishman from Hatley,

province of Quebec, brought to the school in 1852 by Rev. A. Twilight, acquired and lived in the Old Stone House, and on August 29, 1872, he and his wife, Elizabeth Addison, conveyed the property by deed to their daughter, Elizabeth, wife of George Rice, for life.

In 1897, Richard Addison, a brother of Elizabeth Rice, acquired the rights of the other brothers and sisters-in-laws in the property through a Warranty deed. It was recorded August 26, 1905 by the town clerk of Brownington presumably after the death of Elizabeth Rice. In 1916, the Orleans County Historical Society acquired the Old Stone House to prevent its demolition, and the building has remained in their ownership since.

2. Date of Erection: c. 1835-36

Very few factual references to the construction of the Old Stone House have been uncovered. It has been a subject, however, of local imagination and a number of legends have grown up around its builder and its construction. For example, the stone for the four-story building was all quarried from a single boulder and Rev. Alexander Twilight singlehandedly, with the help of a white ox erected the structure, raising and placing the granite blocks (some more than eight feet long) by a series of earth ramps. These and other apocryphal accounts of the construction probably developed around salient facts. They are, however, veiled by many variations on every theme and it is difficult to extract the factual base for the legend.

The building was in use by 1836 and presumably it was finished that same year.

B Historical Events Connected with the Structure

Brownington was chartered October 2, 1780, and is one of the early settlements in Orleans County and an important stop on the Timothy Hinman Road, cut through northern Vermont in 1791 between Greensboro to the South and Stanstead in the province of Quebec to the north. In 1759 the area had been traversed by the Rogers Rangers on their withdrawal from the raid of St. Francis. Up until 1816, Brownington was a half-shire town with Craftsbury. In 1823, it became the seat of the county Grammar School. The school exerted considerable

influence on the life of Orleans and neighboring counties as well as the townships across the Canadian border. A number of the alumni achieved more than local prominence (Hon. E. A. Stewart, Mayor of Cedar Rapids, Iowa; C. F. Renwick, lawyer Chicago, Illinois; General Stephen P. Jocelyn, U.S.A., etc.) and both Judge O. H. Austin of Vermont and Dr. Samuel Reed Hall, the educator and author who invented the blackboard and established the first normal school in America, served on the faculty of the school.

C Sources of Information:

Primary Sources:

1. Browington town clerk's office  
Record of deeds
2. Collection of Orleans County Historical Society correspondence and school programs.

Published Sources:

1. Vermont Historical Gazetteer, edited by Abby Maria Hemenway, volume III, Orleans & Rutland Counties, printed by the Claremont Manufacturing Co., Claremont New Hampshire, 1877.
2. Proceedings of the Orleans County Historical Society from November, 1889, to January 1, 1891, including reports of meeting at Derby, August 1, 1898.
3. Proceeding of the Orleans County Historical Society 1918.
4. Gazetteer and Business Directory of Lamoille & Orleans Counties, Vermont, for 1883-83, compiled and published by Hamilton Child, Syracuse, New York, July, 1883.

PART II ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A General Statement

1. Architectural Statement: An excellent example of early 19th-century northern Vermont architecture with an extraordinary amount of original details and finishes.

2. Condition of fabric: Generally in good condition. Maintained as the Museum of Orleans County Historical Society.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Four stories, rectangular building 36'1" x 66'2", with exterior masonry bearing walls and interior bearing wood stud walls and non-bearing plank wood partions. The building is five bays long by three bays wide.
2. Foundation in granite blocks, set in lime mortar. It is not accentuated and on the exterior, the granite is exposed.
3. Wall construction: Coursed granite block, exposed smooth split stone finish. On the interior, the walls are blocked in with bricks where needed, furred out with lath and plastered. Interior wood walls and partions have split wood lath and plaster finish.

All lintels throughout and the door sills are tool-finished granite blocks. The two main entrances on the north and west side respectively have finished granite block jambs as well. The granite is pale gray in color and has fine grained texture.

4. The building has five (5) doorways to the exterior.

The main entrance is in the north gable end, facing the road. A second entrance, by size and architectural treatment of equal importance, is centered in the west elevation. In the east elevation, two smaller doors give access to the kitchen and in the southernmost bay, to the former pantry. This door also at one time provided communication from the kitchen & the pantry to a wood barn built out perpendicular to the long side of the Old Stone House from the southeast corner of the building. The west gable end of the barn faced on an earth platform, retained by a granite block dry wall extending the full width of the Stone House fourteen feet to the south. The platform level is approximately 3'6" below the second floor level and access from the grade is provided by a series of steps located in the southwest corner of the platform. A doorway in the south gable end from the second floor hallway and steps provided a direct exit from the dormitory floors and previously also provided a connection between the dormitory floors and the barn that housed the latrines.

5. All windows, with two exceptions on the first floor, and the attic lights of the fourth floor, have double-hung sash. On the first and second floor, the sash is twelve lights above twelve lights. On the third and fourth floor, the sash is twelve lights above eight lights. In the gable ends of the building, the windows lighting the central hallway of the second and third floor and the assembly rooms of the fourth floor contain two sash set in a double width frame.

The two exceptions on the first floor are both in the south gable end and provided light to the pantry and the southwest room of the first floor. Due to the elevation of the earth platform against the south gable end, the window openings are only one light high by four wide. The one to the west has been blocked-in fairly recently.

The attic lights in the central elevated section of the fourth floor has fixed 3 x 3 light sash. None of the windows have shutters or provisions for screens. All frames and sash are made in wood.

Exterior Doors: The main doors have a modified panel construction of an unusual design and construction for the area. The door from the pantry is of double board construction, with vertical boards to the weather and horizontal boards on the interior. The door from the kitchen is a straight panel and style construction. The doorways from the second floor hallway have a standard vertical board barn door on the exterior and interior doors with panels and styles. The main doors and the pantry door indicates a builder with a somewhat different technical vocabulary than you would expect to find in northern New England of this period.

6. Roof

a. Shape and Covering: The central 24' of the fourth story for the entire length of building is raised on posts tongued into the floor beams and supporting a straight saddle roof above the center section of the fourth floor. The lean-to roof on both long sides of the central section provide a crawl space for the entire length of the building and is low enough to allow for attic lights in the vertical wood wall between the lean-to roofs and the central saddle roof. The roofing is now corrugated metal, but originally was shingles.

b. The main cornice is of built-up wood mouldings, Greek Revival in character. At corner of building, it is mitered and carried approximately 2'8" over the gable ends to a mitered return.

c. The eaves at present have no emphasis whatsoever. The building, however, at one time had gutters feeding to a cistern located in the built-up platform against the south gable and presumably the eaves were originally more articulated. There are no dormers and at present no chimneys. In its original state, it had six chimneys, three on each side, supported on the exterior walls.

C Description of Interior

1. Floor Plan: On the ground floor, the main entrance in the north gable opens up to a small hallway. The staircase to the second floor faces the entrance. A door to the right, as one enters, provides access to a long room extending the full length of the building. It is referred to as the dining room at present and at one point, if not originally, was divided by folding door partitions into four rooms with a transverse hallway between the central entrance on the west side of the building and the kitchen. To the left in the entrance hallway, a door opens to a parlor that occupies the northeast corner of the ground floor. From the parlor, doors open into a large walk-in closet under the staircase and in the south wall of the parlor, to the large kitchen that takes up most of the central east section of the ground floor. Beyond the kitchen, a former pantry, but now a general storeroom, occupies the southeast corner of the building.

The second floor has a central hallway for the full length of the building with five equal sized rooms on either side. A staircase 2/3 of the way down the hallway provides access to the third floor that with only minor modifications, duplicates the second floor.

The fourth floor has a hallway around the stairs with a library to the south, two smaller rooms on either side of the stairhall, reached through the library, and a large assembly room to the north that takes up more than half of the floor space of the fourth story.

2. Interior staircases are all wood box construction and original.

3. Flooring treatment is wood except in front of fireplaces where brick hearths occur - in most cases, original.
4. Wall and ceiling finishes are plaster and in general, they are original. On the third and fourth floors there is additionally board wainscoating. (see schedules)
5. Doors: All wood with styles and plank construction - mainly four panels, some with modifications and most of them original.
6. Trim: Limited to baseboards, door frames, mantles of fireplaces and beading around window recesses. Except for doors and sash the shaping is restricted to beading.
7. Hardware: Strap and early butt hinges, wrought and cast iron latches, box locks and hooks. In practically all cases, either original or very early.
8. Lighting: The building is not electrified and relies on candles and kerosene lamps for artifical illumination.
9. Heating: The large fireplace in the kitchen contains, in addition to the open cooking hearth, a bake oven, a warmer and a separate section with flue for stewing with a deep kettle 2'7" in diameter.

Additionally, the ground floor has four fireplaces in the "dining room" and two in the parlor. Eight of the rooms on the second floor have fireplaces, while there are no apparent provisions for heating the third and fourth floors.

#### D GENERAL SETTING

1. Site: The site is a nearly level field on the south side of the Brownington-Brownington Center Road, at its junction with the Browington Derby Line Road. The land has a very slight rise to the south and in its present state is grass covered with a row of maples about 25' in from the edge of the road.

The gable end of the building is parrallel to the road and 58' from its edge.

2. Enclosures: There are no enclosures at present except for a wire fence to the rear of the property. Early photographs of the "old Stone House" show fenced-in areas in front and on the sides of the building.




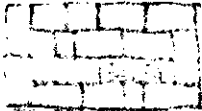

3. **Out buildings:** As mentioned previously, a barn adjoined the Old Stone House at its southeast corner. It was torn down about 1916. At present, a small shed containing latrines south of the building constitute the only out buildings of the site.
4. **Walks and Landscaping:** There are no formal walks and the landscaping is limited to a few ornamentals along the sides of the building. The grounds are mowed and present a trim and clean appearance that complements the stark and spartan character of the building.

Prepared by: Frederick C. Gjessing  
Date: February, 1971

Colors indicated are general in their classification  
are in no cases original

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FIREPLACE SCHEDULE

Fireplace No.	Hearth Pattern	Mantle	Location	Notes
I		white, prob. O	102	bricks of hearth removed
II	same as I	white, prob. O	102	bricks of hearth relayed
III	none	green, unlikely O	106	has only rudimentary mantle shelf
IV	none	none	106	exposed brick of throat
V	none	none	106	exposed brick of throat
VI	none	green, possib. O	106	
VII		N.F. prob. O	201	the two hearths that show less signs of alteration have this pattn
VIII	same as VII	PAP indetermin.	202	
IX	same as VII	cream, not O, replaced	205	the fire caused by the lightning of 1936 damaged rooms 204 & 205. . . . brick of hearth has been relayed
X		gray, prob. O	210	
XI	same as VII	gray, O in part only	209	hearth original
XII	same as X	PAP, indeter	208	hearth original
XIII	none	PAP, indeter.	207	hearth original or early
XIV.	same as VII	N.F. original	206	hearth original

O - Original Indeter. - not determined in all cases, probably original  
Prob - Probably original PAP - papered over N.F. - Natural finish, waxed

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ROOM FINISH SCHEDULE

<u>First Floor</u>	<u>Room No.</u>	<u>Walls</u>	<u>Floors</u>	<u>Baseboard</u>	<u>Ceiling</u>
Hallway	101	Plaster	Brown	Green	Plaster
Parlor	102	PAP	Brown	White	Plaster
Closet	103	PAP	Brown	N. F.	Plaster
Kitchen	104	Plaster	Brown	Tan	Plaster
Pantry	105	Exp. Mason.	V.P.B. & Dirt	None	Plaster
Dining Room	106	Plaster	Brown	Green	Plaster
<u>Second Floor</u>					
General Stephen Jocelyn	201	PAP	Trace of N. F.	N. F.	Plaster
Coventry	202	PAP	Brown	N. F.	Plaster
Greensboro	203	PAP	Red	Gray	Plaster *
Civil War	204	Replast.	Gray	N. F.	Plaster
Craftsbury	205	PAP	Warm Gray	Cream	Plaster
Twilight	206	Plaster	Trace of N. F.	N. F.	Plaster **
Gilbert Cross	207	PAP	Trace of N. F.	N. F.	Plaster
Weaving	208	PAP	Trace of N. F.	N. F.	Plaster
Farm Tools	209	PAP	Light Brown	Gray	Plaster
Dr. Tinkham	210	Plaster	Light Brown	Gray	Plaster
Hallway	211	Plaster	Trace of N. F.	N. F.	Plaster ***

\* Gray of Baseboard and of door probably original

\*\* Windowsills and baseboard show traces of red dash & waves as well as N. F.

\*\*\* Dividing partition in south end of hall has wainscoat in N. F.

ROOM FINISH SCHEDULE (continued)

	<u>Room No.</u>	<u>Walls</u>	<u>Floors</u>	<u>Baseboard</u>	<u>Ceiling</u>
<u>Third Floor</u>					
Derby	301	PAP	Brown	Cream	Plaster
Charleston	302	PAP	Trace of N. F.	N. F.	Plas
Troy	303	PAP	Gray	Cream	Plas
Barton	304	PAP	Brown, Trace of N. F.	N. F.	Plas
Irasburg	305	PAP	Trace of N. F.	N. F.	Plas
Newport	306	PAP & N. F.	U. P. B.	N. F.	Plas *
Glover	307	PAP & N. F.	Trace of N. F.	N. F.	Plas *
Brownington	308	PAP & N. F.	Gray	N. F.	Plas
Albany	309	PAP	Gray	N. F.	Plas
Orleans	310	PAP	Brown	N. F.	Plas
Hallway	311	Plas	Trace of N. F.	N. F.	Plas

Fourth Floor

Assembly	401	Plas & N. F.	N. F.	N. F.	Plas *
	402	Plas	N. F.	N. F.	Plas
Library	403	Plas	N. F.	N. F.	Plas
	404	Plas	Brown	N. F.	Plas
Hallway	405	Plas	N. F.	N. F.	Plas

Key to Abbreviations

Exp. Mason. -- Exposed Masonry

N. F. -- natural finish, original  
wax finished woodwork

Replas. -- replastered

Where colors are indicated, they are probably not original unless ~~specifically~~  
otherwise indicated.

U. P. B. -- unpainted board

Plas. - plaster whitewashed, original  
in most cases

PAP -- papered, none appear to be original

\* -- Board wainscoat in N. F.